3: Wallace & Hoebel E-4, 5 (1933, 1945) 1952
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The Comanches

584 A youngster whose heart was too faint to approach a girl on his own account sought out an old and distantly related woman and put his plight to her. It was up to her secretly to arrange a tryst with the girl of his heart. Thomas Gladwin reports that this service was supplied by a boy's sister, but our informants specifically denied this possibility.[13] "It would make people too suspicious." Furthermore, it seems quite unlikely that a sister would be sent on a mission with sexual implications.

It was after they had got over the first pangs of adolescence that vain young men took to the *tuiβitsi* pattern of showing off. It was a show-off for the girls collectively, however, for no Comanche boy could decently reveal a public display of interest in one girl.

It was good tactics for a young man who had fallen in love with a maiden to seek the acquaintance and to cultivate the friendship of her brother, or some other near relative, or the person who controlled her marriage. If the suitor and the girl's brother were together on the warpath, the suitor might give the brother arrows or a horse and in various ways try to make things easy for him, addressing him as *nɜmɜaʀa*, "our children's uncle," i.e., the brother of my offspring's mother—a subtle hint of things he hoped to come.[14] This could lead the brother to speak a favorable word at home in behalf of his friend—of his bravery, his strength, his ability as a hunter or raider, and other commendable qualities. He might even extend an invitation to the friend to come to his family's lodge. The suitor was also likely to offer the girl gifts, including horses, in an effort to win her favor.

●583 When a suitor had decided that he wanted a certain girl for a wife, he made a present to the girl's brother, her father, or her guardian. The most acceptable gift was a horse. In a few cases a boy was known to work (hunt or raid) for the family of the girl he wanted for a wife for as much as one, two, or three years.[15] In any event, sons-in-law were obligated to provide meat for their wives' parents. There was also love medicine known to certain practitioners who could be [832] induced to charm the girl on behalf of a petitioner so that she could not resist his suit.

[13] Thomas Gladwin, "Comanche Kin Behavior," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. L (1948), 73–94.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Informant: Kills Something; see also Smithwick, *op. cit.*, 183.

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bride himself and waited near by without saying a thing to see if his gift were acceptable. Of course, the girl and her family knew from whom the proffered gift came even if the owner were not visible. Sometimes the girl was dressed up and brought out of the lodge right away and handed over to the suitor, who came forth to accept his prize when he saw that his gift was accepted. At other times the suitor tied his riding horse at the maiden's lodge door and waited out of her sight. If she wished to reject him, she merely turned the horse loose, but if she drove it to the herd, the act signified her willingness to accept the owner and was symbolical evidence that she was willing to take charge of his horses and other property. This simple ceremony seems to have been used frequently even after the herd had been placed in front of the girl's door.[16]

In most cases there was no further ceremony. The bridegroom took the bride to his tipi. There was no necessity for any religious ceremony, no demonstration. If circumstances permitted, there might be feasting and, occasionally, dancing. There is evidence that an occasional marriage did receive official sanction either from the chief, who had the announcement made to the camp, or from the council. The scanty evidence available does not make clear whether these were customary practices of specific bands or whether it was a matter of individual taste, as a public or private ceremony in our own society.

Another form of ceremony which has been reported is that after the horses had been delivered and accepted, the bridegroom killed one of the least valuable, removed the heart, and hung it at the door of his betrothed. After the bride roasted and divided it into equal parts, it was eaten by the couple. The heart of a buffalo or other animal could be substituted.[17]

When a girl learned that a rich suitor whom she did not care to marry was about to propose, she might elope with the man she loved. Couples occasionally eloped when the boy was poor and unable to

[16] This description of obtaining a wife is compiled from statements by informants Kills Something, See How Deep the Water Is, and Medicine Woman; also, Battey, *op. cit.*, 328; Gregg, *op. cit.*, 431–32; Daniel A. Becker, "Comanche Civilization," *Chronicles of Oklahoma*, Vol. I (1923), 250; Mooney, "Calendar History of the Kiowas," *loc. cit.*, 231–33; R. B. Marcy, *Thirty Years of Army Life on the Border*, 49; Lehmann, *op. cit.*, 177–79; Agent Charles Adams to Commissioner of Indian Affairs, September 12, 1890 (Oklahoma Historical Society Library, correspondence file K–33, p. 414).

[17] Gregg, *op. cit.*, 431–32.

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furnish enough ponies or other articles of value to satisfy the parents of the girl. In such a case the relatives and friends of the boy might supply the necessary ponies to soothe the dishonor suffered by the wife's parents, or the young husband himself might later secure sufficient ponies and present them to her parents. After this he was in no danger, for when the customary gifts were sent, the marriage was made valid and the disgrace wiped out. Elopement, however, seems to have been unusual, especially in earlier times, and couples who did elope were socially ostracized to some extent.

The giving or paying of horses and other gifts for a bride was a development in the lives of the Comanches that came with prosperity. People who have goods are interested in them. The pattern was general throughout the plains in the last two centuries, and the Comanches fell in with the practice. In their earlier days of Shoshonean poverty it is unlikely that such marriage customs existed. For some Comanche boys and girls the old Shoshonean way of getting married was enough. If a couple slept together all night, they were considered married. One unscrupulous lad, known to That's It in the Water Horse band, took advantage of this fact to "frame" a girl and win her as wife.

« « « He hid his leggings under the chosen girl's bed blanket. Then he set up the frame in a gambling game. He went in and lost so that he did not have enough to pay all his losses.

He said, "Well, I have some money in my leggings," and he asked his friend to go to the girl's tipi and get them. "They are under her blanket."

His friend went over and asked the girl's father for them. He didn't know a thing about it.

So the boy went right in and pulled the leggings out from under her bed. The father then called in the girl and asked her what about it.

"I didn't know you were married," he said. She denied it, but her mother said, "Well you are old enough; you might just as well go live with your husband!" » » »

Although sleeping together was not the ideal way to get married, it was, nevertheless, idealized. Several of our Comanche friends thought such marriages were happier than the arranged ones. "In an

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583 arranged marriage the wife is likely to become angry on the least provocation and leave." Such precipitate action is explained partly by the fact that girls were given to men much older than they. "If parents give a daughter to an older man, she doesn't like it. If they do it once, nothing is said. If they do it often, people don't like it; they talk."[18]

Occasionally an up-and-coming youth who was industrious and showed promise as a warrior was sought out by a father or brother and asked to marry a girl in their family. Such a man was usually a captive; a fullblood Comanche would consider it disgraceful for him to accept advances from the girl's family. The father or brother in such a case took gifts to the prospective bridegroom. Here there was direct action—no sending of intermediaries or hiding out of sight. If the young man accepted, the girl was brought to him that night, and her parents provided most of the household necessities.

595 All these steps were possibilities in a first marriage. In addition, the Comanches observed several forms of affinal marriage; i.e., marriage to a relative by a previous marriage. The levirate and sororate were the strongest of these. The number of wives might run anywhere from one to six or more. It was a normal pattern for a man to take as wives the younger sister or sisters of his first wife and any women he might have captured or girls who grew up as captives in the tribe. Sororal polygyny was used by parents to induce a son-in-law to observe zealously his economic obligations to them. His reward was a second sister to wife. The contract was frequently made while the child was still quite young, even before she reached teen age. Although such a wife was treated as a child, she shared the privileges of a wife.

Polyandry as practiced by the Comanches was attenuated in form. It was a practice which might also be called "anticipatory levirate" and consisted in brothers' lending each other their wives. "One is really her husband, of course." Sexual jealousy between brothers was socially deprecated. "A man loves his brother; he knows that if his brother dies, no one can replace him; he gives him everything he can," explained That's It. "A brother therefore sends his wife over to him occasionally as a gift. She cannot go of her own free will or

[18] Informant: Breaks Something.

22: Dacus Q-3 (no date) 1960 N06 Comanche N06
(ca. 1870)

222 [ca 1870]
[462] Mountains. But these collections form a very small part of the food necessary to sustain life.

224 462 The animals killed in the chase are skinned, cut up, and brought to camp by the women, who follow the hunters for that purpose. The whole 262 of the carcass is utilized. The entrails are regarded as appetizing morsels. [263] They rarely use any condiment with their meat. When brought home, the [462] women kindle fires and proceed to partly roast the choice pieces for their lords. The poorest pieces of flesh they may be permitted to reserve for themselves.

411 The Comanches are expert horsemen and skillful archers. The iron-tipped arrow impelled from a Comanche's *bois d'arc* bow, is a dangerous missile. They easily send it through an inch board; and I have seen the rib of an old bullock shattered by one of those arrows.

462 Among them, the women are the most abject slaves. The men do nothing, except to follow the chase, go on the war-path, or decorate themselves with 562 feathers and paint. Even this last operation conducive to manly vanity, sometimes falls to the task of the female slaves of the lodge. The slaughtered animals on the plains are brought in by them; the skins are dressed by women, fuel is collected; the herds of ponies are watched; plumes are made, the paint bags are kept in order; the tents or lodges are erected; food is prepared; and, if after performing all these services the Comanche lady finds time heavy on her hands, she is made to minister to the pleasure of her sovereign lord by adorning his buckskin leggings with delicate splotches of paint, and graceful tufts of feather plucked from the prairie eagle; to streak his face with vermillion, yellow ochre, and charcoal, until he appears in all the glory of a full fledged dandy, and then he saunters 562 forth to exhibit his charms to the susceptible maidens of his tribe. The wife, or the daughter, must, at least apparently, be delighted at the magni- 593 ficent "make up" of the dandy husband or father. Theirs is not the privilege to complain.

Among the Comanches, all women occupy the position of slaves. The daughter is the slave to the father; the wife to the husband, and if there are any who do not occupy the relationship of daughter or wife, they are 593 slaves to some male relative, or to the tribe. The father sells his daughter 583 in marriage, and the husband may sell his wife for a pony, a shining piece of silver, or a handful of beads.

562 The women can form no ties, make no bargain, and exercise no choice in social or domestic relations. The father selects a husband for his daugh- 583 ter, exacts a consideration, if she proves agreeable to the chosen son-in-law, and consigns her to him, to do with her as he will. She becomes his slave, 593

22: Dacus Q-3 (no date) 1960 NO6 Comanche NO6
(ca. 1870)

[ca. 1870]

584 unfrequently the talons and beaks of the prairie eagles and falcons, a breast-
301 plate of "hair pipe," and perhaps a few bright plates of metal cut into the
29 form of crosses and crescents and sewed to his gorgeously colored suit of
237 dressed skins. So attired, with his face sometimes painted brown, or blue,
584 and at other times flaming in vermillion colors, or yellow as the victims
302 of "the plague of the Indies," the Comanche beau mounts his pony and proceeds to the lodge of his inamorata, dismounts, and, if the maiden comes and hitches his pony, enters and squats upon the ground; and displays his discontent with his lot by responding to every inquiry with a most dolorous
584 "Ugh! Ugh!" After manifesting his misery to an extent deemed sufficient, the Comanche young gentleman rises with great dignity, and repeating two or three knell-like "Ugh! Ughs!" he remounts and rides off without so much as deigning to utter a word. If the maiden he desires to woo does not take charge of his pony, that ends the courtship. He would despise himself and be the fool of the tribe to persist under such circumstances.

An account of this visit is carefully certified to the master of the lodge, on his return. Our dandy, like many civilized gallants, is always very careful to make his initiatory visit when paterfamilias is not at home. The way is now open for further negotiations. The girl is not usually again consulted. The young dandy has merely condescended to indicate his preference for her. She of course must be delighted. If the father is a chief or
584 principal man in the tribe, he provides a dower for the daughter. The
583 young suitor must be able to respond in equal measure in the way of presents of this world's goods. Sometimes a Comanche belle may have, as a portion, as many as fifty ponies. The suitor in such case should be prepared to turn over fifty-one ponies as a present to his would be father-in-law.
[585] If this can be done, a bargain is usually concluded. No further ceremony is necessary. The maiden and her fifty ponies become the absolute property of the young man. He has "swapped" fifty-one ponies for fifty ponies and got a wife, or rather slave, into the bargain.

585 When negotiations have been concluded, the dandy proceeds to the lodge of his bride, but not in the same plight as before. He enters, throws down his deer skin mantle, casts from him his weapons, and then orders the bride to enter upon her duties as a wife and slave by taking them up and proceeding to follow him to his own lodge, bearing the burdens he has thrown down for her.

[595] The bride may have three or four sisters, and they may all be wives of her husband before the expiration of a week. Mothers-in-law excite
606 little feeling, either of favor or aversion, among the Comanches. They play
585 a minor part in the affairs of the newly constituted households.